

## History Corner # 7: The Apartments - Part One

This History Corner article, in four parts, was written by John Hemler, former director of TRNA. John is many things: Lt Col. Ret. [editor's correction: Col., not Lt. Col., see part two below], US Army; initiator of the TRNA Youth Committee; leader of the TRNA anti-graffiti campaign that was the model for the city's program; member of TRNA for over 25 years, and more. John is uniquely qualified to write about the apartment mess of 1989. He and his wife Miargie watched this drama unfold from their balcony across the street. Thanks for capturing this part of Taylor Ranch history, John!

In mid-May, 1989, as I was returning home from an errand, I saw workmen digging what appeared to be utility ditches at the north west corner of Montañó and San Ildefonso. Since I lived diagonally across the street on Montañó, I was curious, and I stopped to talk to one of the workmen. He informed me that they were preparing the utility ditches and foundations for some apartments. I knew that the land was zoned for apartments, and, after several more questions about their height (two-story, within code) and number of units (20), I left. I did not realize then that what I was witnessing would evolve into the most significant and longest crisis ever to face Taylor Ranch residents!

In early June 1989, TV news reports began to show two rather dilapidated apartment structures being moved from a site near the Presbyterian Hospital, east of I-25. As the days went by, continuing coverage showed the apartments roll onto I-25 and then north to Bernalillo. No destination had been provided by those reporting the news. The apartments approached Bernalillo, crossed the Rio Grande and moved south through Rio Rancho and on to Coors Blvd. City residents watched the coverage with interest, speculating on where they would end up. Finally, on June 12th, they arrived at the northwest corner of Montañó and San Ildefonso! The Taylor Ranch community was in an uproar! What were these run-down, two-story, recycled hospital housing units doing in Taylor Ranch? The following chronology summarizes what happened next:

1. A 6-foot-high chain link fence (city code for renovation sites) was raised around the apartment site and the buildings were placed on foundations.
2. Taylor Ranch residents began picketing the site and gathering petition signatures to remove the apartments
3. On Jun 16th our City Councilor, Pat Baca, called a meeting of residents and city officials. At the meeting, city officials informed us that the apartment owners had met all legal requirements for installing and renovating the apartments. However, Councilor Baca told us that he would initiate a council resolution to condemn them and the Mayor, Ken Shultz, through his spokesman, assured us he would do all that he could to resolve the issue. It was a city council/mayoral election year, so, from a cynical viewpoint, we probably got more attention from the media and city officials running for election than we would have normally received. Also, at this meeting an ad hoc committee of Taylor Ranch residents was formed to examine possible solutions and focus on the problem.
4. Two lawsuits were drafted by Taylor Ranch neighborhood associations, the first being a request to the courts for an injunction to stop work at the site and the second being a request to declare

the apartments a “private nuisance” or “public nuisance” and condemn them. A lawyer, Robert Aragon, who lived in Taylor Ranch provided his services pro bono to the neighborhood.

5. On June 21st, a formal letter to the Mayor requested that actions be taken against the owner of the apartments through condemnation or other proceedings. The letter was signed by the presidents of TRNA and several other neighborhood associations.
6. On June 22nd, a small group of Taylor Ranch residents met informally with several of the owners. At the meeting, the owners described some of the renovations planned. Several additional renovations were offered, but the residents made it clear that their primary objective remained – removal of the apartments from the site.
7. On July 10th, the Mayor and some of his staff met with several of the apartment owners to determine if a trade for other city property was feasible. The next day, the owners provided their written requirements for such a trade:
  - “a) Trade of property (their one acre plus the apartments) for 9.5 acres northwest of the intersection of Coors Road and Interstate 40 with a change of zoning for this parcel to R-3 which would allow apartments.
  - b) Reimbursement for present expenses in the sum of \$277,000.
  - c) Cost of transporting building to a new site and completion..
  - d) A lease of the apartments for ten years by the city, commencing no later than September 1, 1989, payable at \$5000 a month. The city will take over rental of all such apartments.”
8. On July 12th, the Mayor, in a written reply, stated in part that “The terms proposed in your letter are so unreasonable that they do not constitute a legitimate offer on your part... Therefore, due to your unrealistic approach, I do not feel there is a working basis for further discussions.”